

SPEECH

OF

HON. J. R. GIDDINGS, OF OHIO,

ON

CUBAN ANNEXATION.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 14, 1852.

The House being in Committee of the Whole, and the motion to refer the Annual Message of the President to the several committees, under discussion,

Mr. GIDDINGS rose and said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN :

I have risen with no intention to participate in this discussion of the tariff. I abstain from it for the reason that it has been discussed for more than thirty years by the ablest men in the nation, and no new theory or thoughts are likely to be elicited at this time. I abstain from it for the reason that there is now no party which avows the protective policy. I also abstain from its discussion for the reason that the ablest advocates of protection have, since the late Presidential election, declared that policy to be *dead*—that it now sleeps with its great advocate, Henry Clay.

Why, sir, during the recent campaign, a Whig missionary, formerly a member of this body, was sent from New York city to Ohio, to inform us that unless the tariff were increased, the country would be ruined; and here, sir, on the second day of the session, his Whig successor, elected with the aid of his vote and influence, moved a resolution to reduce the tariff. Now, it is quite evident that whether it be increased or diminished, the Whigs of New York are to enjoy the victory, for they are on both sides of the question. But I think there is an intention, on the part of the majority of the House, to do neither, and thereby disappoint both factions of the New York Whigs. [Laughter.]

Its discussion at this time, is unseasonable and out of place. The short session will not afford sufficient opportunity to mature a readjustment of the duties on imports; and, sir, we are all conscious that the responsibility rests

upon the majority of this body, who are evidently disinclined to enter upon it at present. Our country was never more prosperous; and never did the people feel less desirous of a change of tariff than at this time. That indifference was very apparent during the late political campaign. If our most popular speakers attempted to discuss this subject, their meetings would "grow small by degrees, and beautifully less." So, too, during the three days this body has been occupied by it. Members would not listen to the eloquent speeches presented by their colleagues; and most of that time, our hall has been nearly deserted.

The discussion has become "flat, stale, and unprofitable." And whatever my feelings may be, I cannot disguise the fact, that the popular tendency in England, throughout Europe, and in this country, is toward free trade. Experience is the only test which can be applied to these theories. The truth of this remark is exemplified in the operation of the present tariff. At the time of its adoption, we were told that it would not produce revenue sufficient to carry on the Government. Yet although our expenditures were nearly doubled by the Mexican war, we have now more revenue than sufficient to meet all demands upon our Treasury. These facts should teach us to be less tenacious of our theories, and more willing to be guided by experience.

We are all conscious that but one great interest in these United States is now protected by a prohibitory tariff that is, the slave-breeding interest of Virginia and the other Northern slave States. We protect the slave-grower by visiting the penalty of death upon those who import slaves to the injury of our own citizens, who rear boys and girls for the market. These facts stand prominent upon the history of our times. We have secured to the slave-dealers

of this nation a monopoly of the crime of buying and selling human flesh.

Now, sir, with all kindness, I will say to those advocates for protection to Northern labor, that while they make merchandise of the Southern laborer, of his wife and children, it will be in vain for them to profess humane sympathy for the free and independent laborers of the North. While you profess an anxious solicitude for the pecuniary interest of the laborer in the cotton mill, and at the same time make merchandise of the bone and sinews, the blood and muscle of him who cultivates the raw material, the people will pronounce you hypocrites.

I this morning read in one of our papers an account of a slave mother, having four children whom she tenderly loved. Her soul yearned for their happiness. But her master contracted to deliver them to a slave-dealer. She vainly implored him to desist from his purpose. He persisted; and as she saw her offspring about to be torn from her embrace, she felt unable to meet such separation, and, in order to save her loved ones from the suffering and degradation to which your laws consigned them, she mercifully deprived them of life. A few days afterwards, she was herself consigned to the gallows, for this manifestation of her affection, and the whole family of five persons were placed beyond the further cruelty of your laws.

Now, sir, while we continue in force laws which inflict such suffering upon one portion of our fellow-mortals, and at the same time profess an anxiety for the pecuniary interest of another portion, will not all candid men charge us with hypocrisy and falsehood?

Mr. JOHNSON, of Tennessee, said, if he understood the gentleman from Ohio, he was in favor of removing the protection to slave labor by repealing the law which prohibits the importation of slaves.

Mr. GIDDINGS. The gentleman is mistaken; it was the protection of the slave-grower to which I referred. It is the law of Congress, which authorizes the domestic slave trade, that I condemn. That traffic is far more barbarous than the foreign slave trade, which we very properly characterize as *piracy*, and punish with death. Dealing in human flesh is, in a moral point of view, a naked, undisguised piracy; it is so regarded by all reflecting men; and those who traffic in human flesh, either here, in Africa, or elsewhere, and all who advise, aid, counsel, or encourage such traffic, are guilty, and deserve death upon the gallows. The manner in which we aid and encourage this crime is immaterial. If we lend that encouragement by passing laws to protect the slave-dealer, or by lending our influence to retain such laws in force, we are as guilty as he who actually buys and sells the victims of this traffic, and we, sir, deserve death as much as he does. I would not hang the ignorant

sailor who goes to Africa and purchases men and women there, and spare the member of Congress who exerts his influence to continue the same crimes here. Had I the power to punish these crimes, I would inflict the same penalty upon every man who deals in human flesh, or who authorizes or encourages such traffic.

I observed that the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. JONES] took occasion, while discussing the tariff, to say that the Democracy of his State were in favor of the Fugitive Law; but it is somewhat remarkable that the President, in his message, makes no mention of that law. It is said, that during the last three months more fugitives have found their way to Canada than ever previously emigrated to that province in the same space of time. They went singly, in pairs, in companies of five, of ten; and sometimes twenty or more travelled together. Scarcely a slave-catcher interposed to prevent this tide of emigration; and those who made attempts to stop them were unsuccessful. The emigrants were armed and ready for the combat. They laughed at your Fugitive Law, and ridiculed those who enacted and who advocate its continuance. As the President is about to retire from office, he witnesses the contempt into which this, his favorite measure, has fallen, yet he fails in his last annual message to notice these facts, nor does he make even an effort to modify the popular odium which has pronounced those Compromise measures *infamous*. He sees the country rapidly separating into two parties—the supporters of slavery and the advocates of liberty. He must be conscious that these parties will soon swallow up all other organizations. The free Democracy and the slave Democracy will soon characterize our political distinctions, and the Democratic principle of man's national right to liberty will be vindicated and sustained; yet he remains silent on the subject.

And here I wish to say to the friends of liberty, that our cause is advancing rapidly, and with firmer and surer pace than at any former period. The old political organizations have lost their moral power. The election of the great Western statesman, Thomas H. Benton in opposition to both the Whig and Democratic parties, shows the tendency of men to think and vote agreeably to the dictates of their own judgment, and not according to caucus dictation, or party rule. He, sir, was unconnected with all parties. He was the exponent of his own views; the people approved his sentiments, and, setting party dictation at defiance, they elected him. Nor was the election of the distinguished philanthropist from New York, Gerrit Smith, less a triumph of independent political thought and action. These distinguished gentlemen were connected with a

political parties, out each was elected upon his own merits.

I have not time to speak of the election to this body of the Free Democratic members, and of Whig and Democratic members elected by aid of the Free Democracy; nor are those elections, triumphant as they are, even an indication of the extent of our progress. Our principles are cherished by hundreds of thousands of the other parties, who have heretofore been unable to separate themselves from their long-cherished political organizations, but who now say they have acted with them for the last time.

Again, sir, we have enlisted the literati of our country on the side of truth, liberty, and justice. To my fair countrywomen I would say, that a lady, with her pen, has done more for the cause of freedom, during the last year, than any servant, statesman, or politician of our land. That inimitable work, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," is now carrying truth to the minds of millions, who, to this time, have been deaf to the cries of the down-trodden. It is arousing the sensibilities of this country and of Europe. It goes where no other Anti-Slavery work ever found its way, and quietly carries conviction to the hearts of its readers. It has been dramatized, and both in this country and in Europe the play-going public listen with intense interest to the wrongs, the revolting crimes, of slavery. Thus, the theatre, that "school of vice," has been subsidized to the promulgation of truth, and the hearts of thousands have been reached, who were approachable in no other way.

The clergy of the North are awakening to duty, to the calls of humanity. No longer are we called to listen to "lower law" sermons, nor are the feelings of our Christian communities shocked by reading discourses from Doctors of Divinity, intended to sanctify and encourage the most transcendent crimes which ever disgraced mankind. Churches and ecclesiastical bodies are beginning to move in behalf of truth, of Christian principles. They are purifying themselves from those who deal in God's image; they are withdrawing church fellowship from those pirates who deserve the gallows and halter, rather than a seat at the communion table of Christian churches.

I have glanced at these facts in answer to those who have spoken before me, and for the encouragement of our friends, in order to assure them, that while Whigs and Democrats in this Hall are discussing the propriety of protecting "cotton cloth" and "cut nails," the advocates of freedom have not forgotten the duty of protecting the rights of our common humanity.

But, Mr. Chairman, my principal object, in rising, was to call the attention of this body and of the country, to the first in the series of resolutions presented by the honorable Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means,

[Mr. Houston.] It refers to our "foreign relations." The position we hold towards the Governments of Spain, Great Britain, and France, is unusually important at this time. The recent publication of the correspondence between our Executive and the Spanish Ministry has excited a deep and pervading interest throughout the country.

And, sir, I here take pleasure in vindicating the President against the assaults made upon him by some presses of the South, for publishing this correspondence. With its publication he had no concern whatever. We, sir, by resolution, called for the correspondence. As the Representatives of the sovereign people, we had a right to it. He had no right to withhold it. As he was bound by his oath and by the Constitution, he sent it to us. We ordered it printed. The people had a right to see and understand what their servants were doing on this as well as on all other subjects.

This correspondence is highly important. It shows to the country and to the civilized world, that for thirty years the Executive has exerted our national influence to maintain slavery in Cuba, in order that the institution may be rendered more secure in the United States. This policy stands out in bold relief; it pervades the whole correspondence, and was also incorporated into the instructions of our Commissioners to the Congress of Panama, although those instructions are not embraced in the communication now before us.

Both Whig and Democratic Administrations have adopted this policy; and although I have but little time to read extracts from this correspondence, I will give one from the letter of Mr. Webster, Secretary of State, marked "*Private and Confidential*," to our Consul at Havana, dated January 14, 1843, in which the author refers to reported intentions of British Abolitionists and the British Ministry to aid in the abolition of slavery, and in the establishment of an independent Government in Cuba; he says: "If this scheme should succeed, the influence of Britain in this quarter, it is remarked, will be unlimited. With six hundred thousands blacks in Cuba, and eight hundred thousand in her West India Islands, *she will* (it is said) *strike a blow at the existence of slavery in the United States.*" These, sir, are the words of a man who opposed all expression, by this Government, of sympathy with oppressed Hungary; who was so strongly opposed to all intervention with the affairs of other Governments in favor of liberty.

We, sir, hold our own institutions by the right of revolution, which he so severely condemned. He appears to have been shocked at the idea that liberty should be enjoyed in Cuba, and avowed himself willing to prostitute the naval and military power of the United States to uphold a system of oppression in that Island, which consigns to premature graves one tenth

part of its whole slave population annually—a system by which eighty thousand human victims are said to be sacrificed every year to Spanish barbarity and Spanish cupidity. Sir, at this moment the Senate are engaged in eulogizing the statesman who has himself erected this monument to perpetuate his own disgrace. They, sir, are endeavoring to falsify the truth of history; to cover up those stains upon his character which no time can erase, and no effort of friends can purify. They can never separate his memory from the great errors of his life. Sir, it is right and proper that the evil deeds of public men should be remembered, that posterity may avoid their crimes, and duly estimate their moral and political worth. Yet, sir, we were told during the recent canvass, that unless we voted for the Whig candidate, if we permitted the Democratic candidate to be elected, Cuba would be annexed and slavery extended and strengthened in the United States. Plausibility was given to this argument by a certain distinguished Senator from the West, who travelled somewhat extensively, making speeches in favor of Cuban annexation and filibustering expeditions to that Island. I desire to say, very distinctly, that in my opinion, that gentleman “*ran before he was sent.*” He appeared anxious to obtain Southern favor, by making himself the advocate of what he deemed Southern measures. I think if he had waited a few months, and consulted the sober reflecting statesmen of the South, they would have told him to remain quiet. But he hastened to acquire Southern favor, and, like some who have gone before him, he will find hereafter that he has run his bark upon the same rock on which so many Northern statesmen have made shipwreck of their political hopes. Other Democratic candidates of the North have pursued the same policy, and some Whigs have striven to keep pace in this race of servility. Among others, I notice a Whig paper in New York, of somewhat extensive circulation, avowing the policy of annexing Cuba. Others have taunted the Free Democracy with having lent our influence to that policy, by refusing to vote for the Whig candidate.

Now, sir, I would say to them, that the Free Democracy is not altogether composed of boys and unfledged politicians; nor is it guided by men destitute of experience and forethought. We, sir, look not to the other parties for guidance; we do our own thinking and our own voting. We have our own views upon this question as well as on all others.

Gentlemen of the Democratic party, who have spoken here, have alluded directly to this policy, but have carefully withheld all expression of their own views, or the views of their party, in reference to it. I had hoped to hear from gentlemen the designs of the incoming President. At least I hoped to hear what they themselves think of this policy. Are they, in-

dividually, in favor of it or against it? No one has presumed to avow his own thoughts. Now, I would say to those members, you were sent here to represent the people. Franklin Pierce was elected to carry out and execute the laws which we enact—not to represent the voice of the people in enacting laws. God has given to you the powers of thought and reflection. He has given to you judgment and conscience. It is your duty to exercise those judgments and obey your own consciences—not to wait for General Pierce to tell you how to act and what to do, nor to obtain instructions on these subjects from the incoming President, or from the members of his Cabinet. If you do this, you are not *representatives of the people*, but of General Pierce, who will take care to represent himself. If you do this, you will not deserve the name of *freemen*. No, gentlemen, you and I were commissioned to avow the popular will of the nation; and God forbid that we should wait to receive instructions from any other human being.

But, as I have remarked, no Democrat has as yet intimated the policy of the incoming Administration in regard to Cuba; and as the country is desirous of understanding what that policy will be, I will volunteer to speak for the President elect. [Laughter.] As my colleague in the Senate yesterday remarked, “I am a Democrat, by the grace of God, *free and independent.*” and as I have no doubt as to the policy of General Pierce, I will give my opinion as to his course on this subject. If he be the man—the statesman—that I take him to be, he will neither say nor *do anything about it*. He will leave it in silence. He will not follow the example of one of his predecessors, who, in his inaugural address, declared our title to the *whole* of Oregon to be *clear and unquestionable*, and when the British lion began to growl and show his teeth, our President backed out of his position, and surrendered one-half to British rule. No; General Pierce will not be likely to follow such an example. He will look thoroughly into this subject before he commits himself in regard to it.

It is certain that former Administrations and a portion of the people of the United States have long coveted Cuba, and would gladly now wrest it from the control of Spain, if they could do so with safety. The objects for which they would do it, I have already adverted to. But an omniscient, all-wise Providence has thrown around the consummation of that great national crime such difficulties, and embarrassments, and positive dangers, that, in my opinion, it will never be perpetrated.

The first, and only mode, in which we can hope to obtain Cuba, is by *peaceful, quiet purchase*. Suppose the Spanish Crown should consent to take \$100,000,000, as proposed by Mr. Buchanan, for the transfer of Cuba to this Government, and our President should stipulate to

pay it; I would yet say to the Spanish Cortes, and to British and to French statesmen, that not one dollar of that amount can go to the possession of Spain until this House shall make the appropriation. I wish them to understand that the people here are the source of all political power, and their Representatives control the Treasury of the country.

Now, sir, what benefit will the people of Ohio, or of any free State, receive by the annexation of Cuba, for which they are to be taxed to such a large amount? The first effect would be to bring to this Hall eleven Spanish members, to enact laws to govern our people. Those Spaniards will be ignorant of our language, bred and educated under Spanish despotism, unacquainted with our institutions; men who never exercised the right of suffrage, and who have no just views of Free Governments. I do not think the influence of such men in this Hall would be worth \$100,000,000. But the Spanish population of Cuba would not only be brought into full political association with our people, but they would come into the Union with greater advantages, influence, and power, over our rights and interests, than we ourselves possess. Their influence under our Constitution will be proportioned to the number of their slaves, counting five of those newly-imported Cuban negroes, fresh from the African coast, equal in moral and political influence to three of our free citizens of the North; so that the holder of five of those slaves will wield the same influence in the Federal Government which four of our Northern men exercise. Now, let those Representatives who really think their constituents to be worthy of only one-fourth part of the moral and political influence to which those Cuban slaveholders are entitled, vote to give the \$100,000,000 to degrade their constituents and posterity to the level of those Cuban slaves. Sir, I deny the right and the constitutional power of this Government thus to degrade and disgrace the freemen of Ohio. Will my Democratic colleagues, or my Whig colleagues, take issue with me on this point? Will either of those parties inscribe Cuban annexation upon their banner at the next election? Yet, sir, until the people consent thus to disgrace themselves and their children in coming time, this insult to our dignity cannot be consummated. Will not such a proposition stir up agitation? But, sir, we have merely commenced upon the difficulties which surround and embarrass the purchase of Cuba. The eight hundred thousand slaves of Cuba were mostly born in Africa, and imported to that island. They are desperate, and have little regard for human life. For many years past the military force required to hold them in subjection has been estimated at twenty thousand men, or twice the military force now maintained by this Government. The annual cost of maintaining such an army in that island

would not probably fall short of \$20,000,000; and the expense of civil government, including light-houses, local legislation, pay of members of Congress, &c., would not be less than \$3,000,000; while the revenue, under our laws being assessed only upon imports, would not exceed \$2,500,000. Thus there would be a net annual expenditure of more than twenty millions of dollars over the revenues of the island to hold their slaves in subjection. That amount would be drawn mostly from our laboring men of the free States. And now I ask, in all kindness, how long do you believe the laboring people of Ohio would consent to pay troops at that rate to stand sentinel over the slave drivers of Cuba, while they lash these degraded minions into submission?

But a standing army of twenty thousand men will not be sufficient to maintain this system of oppression. That island now imports some thirty thousand African slaves annually. They are ignorant and stupid; they have no common language, and are incapable of any concerted movement for freedom. By annexing Cuba to the United States, this foreign slave trade will be cut off, and the supply of victims will then be drawn from our slave-trading States. This, sir, is the great object for which annexation is sought. It will enhance the price of human chattels in our Northern slave States. But here, again, God has thrown around this gigantic crime, dangers which cannot be avoided. These slaves will be more enlightened; they will speak the English language, which is spoken in all the British Islands. They will have some knowledge of their rights, and of the means of obtaining them. Nor will they want for leaders to guide them in the work of achieving their liberty. The whole eight hundred thousand free colored people in the neighboring islands will sympathize with them. Some Douglass, some Remond, some Ward, or other hero, will be found to plan and conduct insurrections, some Touissant to lead them in battle. Your troops will find active employment. Fire and sword will be called into service; devastation, rapine, and slaughter, will be carried by the infuriated slaves over the plantations and villages. Two hundred thousand colored men, rendered desperate by barbarous oppression, will constitute no mean force, when fighting for life and liberty. In that struggle, Mr. Jefferson has assured us the Almighty possesses no attribute which will permit him to take sides with the oppressors. No, sir, our consciences and our sympathies must be with the oppressed. Our prayers will be that justice shall take place; and if the oppressors be laid low in death, we shall view it with Christian submission. Then, sir, this Government will possess the constitutional power to conclude a peace by the total abolition of this accursed system of oppression. And do you think that Congress will long con-

tinue such a war? Will they shoot down those who thus strike for liberty? Or will they not rather consent to return to them their God-given rights?

And, sir, I would say to our Southern friends, that when this spirit of liberty shall once be aroused among the blacks of Cuba, they will be very likely to bring the war into Florida, Alabama, and other Southern States. Mr. Chairman, annex Cuba now, with its present slave population, and you and I may live to see our slave States devastated by a servile war. Indeed, I am surprised that the colored population there have remained supinely inactive so long. These States are at this time suppressed volcanoes, ready to burst forth whenever the elements shall become agitated. The annexation of Cuba will rock this Union to its centre, and the hidden flames will find vent, and the fire will extend until slavery be consumed. When that day of retributive justice shall overtake our Southern friends, we, sir, will interpose, not by shooting down the victims of oppression, by murdering those who have been oppressed, wronged, and outraged, but by making peace with them upon terms of justice, and admitting them to the enjoyment of their liberty.

But, Mr. Chairman, I have spoken only of the peaceful purchase of Cuba, and its consequences. It is the only mode in which we can obtain it. We can get it in no other mode. Slavery sits like an incubus upon our nation, paralyzing all our energies, and rendering a war with any powerful nation impolitic and dangerous. We cannot go to war for the conquest of Cuba. And, sir, from what we learn by the correspondence before us, as well as from other sources, Spain will not be likely to sell it to us. She has taken her position on this point, and has long maintained it. She will continue to maintain it. The old Castilian determination of purpose will guide her councils in future. I am, therefore, very clearly of opinion that we shall not have Cuba, so long as the friends of liberty continue to call public attention to the wrongs and crimes of slavery.

The policy of the Spanish Government to set the slaves of Cuba free, in case of formidable invasion, forbids all hope of obtaining it by conquest. It is now well known that, prior to the Lopez expedition, the Governor General had express orders, if he found it necessary to defend the island, to abolish slavery and put arms into the hands of the emancipated slaves. Now, sir, our filibustering politicians will have no object in obtaining Cuba, unless they can thereby obtain it with slavery. They fight for oppression, not for freedom. With these facts before the country, we shall have no more filibustering expeditions. Our political filibusters will now disappear. They will escape the garrote, but will be reserved for political suffocation.

Mr. Chairman, I speak my own opinions. No other man is responsible for what I say. I have given some attention to this subject, and have satisfied my own mind, that while the advocates of liberty shall continue their efforts for freedom, their struggles for justice to all men, *Cuba will not be annexed*. I congratulate the friends of liberty and of humanity upon the important position they have attained. The very efforts which our opponents said would secure the annexation of Cuba, have, under the circumstances to which I have referred, prevented the perpetration of that outrage. It is the bold, unflinching agitation and maintenance of truth, by political, moral, and religious efforts, that has saved us from that degradation. Had we, sir, united with the other political parties at the late election; had we then disbanded, there would have been danger of the annexation of Cuba, even at the price of war and bloodshed. But we have attained the position which enables us by our efforts to command the respect of our opponents; and more especially has our course commanded the respect of ourselves—of *good men*—of the lovers of liberty in this country and in Europe, and, as I humbly trust, the approval of God himself. Slavery can only flourish, it can only exist, in the quiet repose of peace. It cannot continue amid the storm of war or the rage of moral elements. All history shows us that slavery cannot exist amidst the agitation of truth. Justice is the great moral antagonism of oppression. They cannot exist together. I indulge the hope that slavery has reached its limits: that it cannot pass beyond its present boundaries, if we remain true to our purpose and our principles. Its proud waves are already stayed. Cuba must remain attached to the crown of Spain. Yet I would say to British and to French statesmen, that if they wish to obtain it for the purpose of establishing liberty there, of giving freedom to its down-trodden people, let them satisfy Spain and take the island. *We shall submit*, for the very obvious reason that, while we hold our own slave population in subjection, we cannot enter into a war with either of those Powers in order to maintain that institution in Cuba. We, sir, would rather see Cuba free, under British or French rule, than see our fellow-men oppressed, degraded, and ruthlessly murdered, under either Spanish or American authority. But if it remains subject to Spanish laws, its final redemption is not so far distant as we have been accustomed to think. The employment of Chinese laborers in that island has proved far more profitable than that of slaves. Indeed, it is said the expense of carrying on their plantations by the labor of these free people from China, is less than half that of slave labor. At this time there are said to be six thousand Chinamen on their passage to Cuba, for the purpose of engaging in the cultivation of the soil. The laws of Cuba are

also more favorable to emancipation than those of our slave States. These circumstances, under the guidance of Providence, amid the lights and intelligence of the present age, are slowly but surely working out the redemption of Cuba, even under Spanish rule. Yet its annexation to this Union would, in my opinion, hasten the overthrow of slavery, both there and in our slave States.

The world is moving in favor of liberty. Redemption to the African race upon this continent must soon come. I trust it will come in peace; but I will add, in the language of our departed coadjutor, John Quincy Adams, "Let it come: if it must come in *blood*, yet, I say

LET IT COME."

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